

Message Text

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PAGE 01 QUEBEC 00082 260034Z
ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMCONSUL QUEBEC
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 904
INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUEBEC 0082

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: NEITHER INDEPENDENCE NOR STATUS QUO: A THIRD OPTION

1. THE "OTHER LEVESQUE," GERARD D., INTERIM LEADER OF QUEBEC LIBERAL PARTY, YESTERDAY TOLD ME HE SEES THE PRINCIPAL MISSION OF HIS PARTY AS THAT OF FORMULATING AND CHAMPIONING "THIRD CONSTITUTIONAL OPTION." HE BELIEVES MAJORITY OF QUEBECOIS WANT NEITHER INDEPENDENCE NOR THE FEDERALIST STATUS QUO. IN ABSENCE MORE NUANCED OPTION THAN THESE, DEBATE THUS FAR HAS BEEN SHAPED BY ADVOCATES OF TWO EXTREMES, I.E. RENE LEVESQUE AND PIERRE TRUDEAU. PROVINCIAL LIBERAL PARTY WILL ATTEMPT PRESENT ANOTHER OPTION WHICH WOULD PROPOSE SUBSTANTIALLY LOOSENED FEDERAL ARRANGEMENT.

2. GERARD D. LEVESQUE BELIEVES PEQUISTES LEADERS HAVE BEEN SIGNALING A RECEPTIVITY TO OFFERS OF COMPROMISE. HE CITED AS EVIDENCE OF THIS THESIS A RECENT STATEMENT BY GERALD GODIN, WHO DEFEATED FORMER PREMIER BOURASSA IN LAST ELECTION, TO EFFECT THAT P.Q. WOULD NOT SIEZE INDEPENDENCE IF THEY COULD SATISFY THEIR OBJECTIVES BY NEGOCIATION. LEVESQUE ALSO MENTIONED RENE LEVESQUE'S RECENT

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STATEMENT THAT HE WOULD BE PLEASED TO NEGOCIATE WITH TRUDEAU, BUT LATTER HAD AS YET MADE NO COUNTER OFFER UPON WHICH NEGOCIATION COULD BE BASED. (QUEBEC 77)

3. THE LIBERAL LEADER SAID HE DOES NOT KNOW HOW FLEXIBLE TRUDEAU IS PREPARED TO BE IN CONSIDERING CONSTITUTIONAL CONCESSIONS TO QUEBEC. HOWEVER, HE CITED LARGE ENTRENCHED FEDERAL

ESTABLISHMENT IN OTTAWA AS GREATEST BARRIER TO DEVOLUTION OF POWER. HE BELIEVES POLITICAL LEADERS, WHATEVER THEIR WISHES, WOULD HAVE GREAT DIFFICULTY OVERCOMING RESISTENCE FROM THIS FORMIDABLE SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP.

4. ON REFERENDUM, GERARD D. LEVESQUE IS CONFIDENT THAT MAJORITY NOW UNDECIDED BUT WOULD PROBABLY OPPOSE INDEPENDENCE IN UNAMBIGUOUS VOTE. HOWEVER, HE IS NOT SURE WHETHER ATTITUDES OF MAJORITY WILL REMAIN CONSTANT OVER NEXT TWO YEARS. EVEN NOW, RESULTS COULD DEPEND ON WORDING OF QUESTION. LIBERALS, THEREFORE, WILL STRUGGLE TO ASSURE PEOPLE HAVE CLEAR, UNEQUIVOCAL CHOICE PROVIDING LEGITIMATE EXPRESSION OF POPULAR WILL. EFFORTS ALSO WILL BE MADE INCLUDE "THIRD OPTION" IN REFERENDUM. HE ASSUMES P.Q. WILL ATTEMPT BLOCK SUCH MOVE PREFERING FORCE VOTERS CHOOSE BETWEEN EXTREMES OF INDEPENDENCE OR STATUS QUO. FACED WITH THIS "HOBSON'S CHOICE," PEOPLE MAY RELUCTANTLY OPT FOR INDEPENDENCE.

5. CLAUDE RYAN, IN ARTICLE ON EDITORIAL PAGE OF TODAY'S "LE DEVOIR," ECHOED THIS CONCERN OVER CHOICE BEING OFFERED QUEBECOIS. HE TOO BELIEVES MAJORITY OF QUEBECOIS WOULD REJECT EXTREMES IN REFERENDUM IF OFFERED OPTION OTHER THAN INDEPENDENCE OR THE "RIGID" FEDERALISM OF MR. TRUDEAU. PROVINCIAL LIBERALS, WHO HAVE LONG TRADITION AS AUTONOMISTS, STILL HAVE USEFUL ROLE TO PLAY IN INJECTING THIS MORE "NUANCED" CHOICE INTO DEBATE, RYAN CONTENTED. MCNAMARA

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